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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Fifty-seventh session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 48th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 10 April 2001, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mr. DESPOUY (Argentina)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.35 p.m.

INTEGRATION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE:

(a) VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

(agenda item 12) (continued) (E/CN.4/2001/3, 6, 70-72, 73 and Add.1 and 2 and 126; E/CN.4/2001/NGO/24, 25, 32, 37, 46, 56, 72, 77, 95, 113, 127, 151 and 169; E/CN.4/Sub.2/2000/17, 18 and 21)

1. Mr. NEELSEN (Society for Threatened Peoples), referring to the 30,000 Muslim Bosnian women held in Serbian rape camps for months on end in 1992, said that mass rape was a feature of the Serbian/Yugoslav war strategy. Many of the camp inmates had been forced to watch as their fathers, husbands or brothers were killed in front of them. The great majority were currently living as displaced persons in collective shelters, 90 per cent of them without work and forgotten by the international public. Only in a very few cases were they receiving any form of humanitarian assistance. Many had been severely traumatized but were receiving no psychotherapeutic support.

2. His organization called on the United Nations to ensure that the Serb politicians responsible for the systematic mass rape of Bosnian women - Slobodan Milosevic, Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic - were handed over immediately to the International War Crimes Tribunal; that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) worked with the relief and aid agencies in Bosnia and Herzegovina to meet the needs of the women former camp inmates and their children; that funding was obtained to accelerate the programme of exhumations to recover the bodies of up to 29,000 missing Bosnians so as to establish the fate of the missing, presumed dead, relatives of the women camp inmates and the women murdered in the rape camps; and that financial resources were made available by the international community to provide basic and further education for former camp inmates and their children.

3. Ms. AMALIA (Netherlands Organization for International Development Cooperation) said that women and girls had become the most regular victims of human rights violations in Indonesia, and the State provided no protection for them. The limited and submissive role of women under Indonesia's Marriage Law of 1974 facilitated domestic violence, and legal safeguards to protect women in cases of polygamy and divorce were completely ineffective and in any case never implemented. In areas of conflict, violence committed by the military and militias often targeted women in order to intimidate communities.

4. As a result of economic changes, women had become low-wage workers without contracts or protection, their health had been adversely affected by environmental pollution and the economic crisis had caused many to lose their jobs and seek work abroad. Because Indonesia had not ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and had failed to protect its nationals working overseas in other ways, women were left vulnerable, and there were many cases of exploitation and even trafficking.

5. The Indonesian Government had taken some welcome steps, however, through its zero tolerance programme on violence against women, the signing of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the trial of a rape case in Aceh, but much remained to be done. There had been progress, but not enough. Her organization requested the Commission to urge the Indonesian Government to end all discriminatory policies against women and implement structural policies to protect and promote their rights; to implement all the recommendations made by the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, particularly regarding witness and victim protection and the establishment of shelters; to withdraw all reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and ratify its Optional Protocol; and to end impunity and prosecute all perpetrators of violations against women in Indonesia.

6. Ms. KAMARUZZAMAN (Australian Council for Overseas Aid) said that, despite the Indonesian Government's decision to end military operations in Aceh province in 1998, sexual violence against women there continued. Violence and rape had been perpetrated by armed civilian groups wearing uniforms to impersonate the military as well as by military personnel. Women were also subject to torture, kidnapping and killing. In some cases they had been used as shields during combat. They were also used for political bargaining by the two sides. Moreover, after the Indonesian Government introduced Islamic law in Aceh, women had become victims of violence through the misinterpretation of religious teaching.

7. Her organization urged the Commission to work with the Indonesian Government to organize a visit by a delegation or by the Special Rapporteur on violence against women to investigate and monitor the violence and other forms of human rights abuse; and to persuade the Indonesian Government as matter of urgency to accept responsibility for the violence in Aceh during military operations, to rehabilitate and pay compensation to the victims of violence by military personnel, to give protection to witnesses and human rights defenders and humanitarian workers, and to withdraw all military personnel from the civil region.

8. Ms. ARIFIN (Third World Movement Against Exploitation of Women) said that, in areas of armed conflict in Indonesia, such as Aceh, the Moluccas and Kalimantan, vulnerable groups like women and children became direct victims through being targeted for killing or rape. They also suffered mental traumas from witnessing brutal incidents. Several cases had been documented of women in the Moluccas becoming pregnant as a result of rape by members of the security apparatus and then being abandoned. The conflicts had also resulted in huge numbers of internally displaced persons, the majority of whom were women and children. Women had an important role to play in creating a climate of peace, but were under-represented or not represented at all in efforts to settle conflicts.

9. Her organization requested the Commission to urge the Indonesian Government to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; to pay special attention to the needs and security of women and children in situations of internal conflict and displacement; to prosecute the perpetrators of violence against women in areas of conflict; and to initiate a programme for the rehabilitation and compensation of victims.

10. Ms. KAI (International League for Human Rights) said that civil war and State-sponsored violence by the military regime in Myanmar had been the major cause of trafficking of women and girls from Myanmar into the sex industry in neighbouring countries. According to Human Rights Watch, at least 40,000 women from Myanmar were working in the sex industry in Thailand alone, and the number of women and girls from Myanmar doing similar work on the China-Myanmar border was increasing.

11. Lack of basic information and access to primary health care in Myanmar meant that the victims of trafficking were particularly vulnerable to HIV infection and other sexually transmitted diseases. For a variety of reasons, returning to Myanmar was not an option for most of them. For HIV-positive women, the choices were even more limited: they were shunned by the community and disowned by their families and HIV/AIDS programmes were inadequate and ineffective throughout Myanmar.

12. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women having been ratified by Myanmar, the military regime there must take appropriate steps to suppress all forms of trafficking in women and girls. So far it had not taken the issue seriously, and had not implemented effective education and rehabilitation programmes. Her organization requested the Commission to urge the Myanmar authorities to cease State-sponsored violence against women, stop the armed conflict and engage in the tripartite dialogue with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the leaders of the ethnic nationalities.

13. Ms. DOSWALD-BECK (International Commission of Jurists) said that her organization was deeply concerned that the criminal justice system in many jurisdictions perpetuated the very abuses it was designed to punish. That was especially evident with regard to violence against women. Discriminatory provisions in national legislation, punitive legal action against women who denounced such violence and flawed judicial practices fostered a climate of impunity for such crimes. It was a perverse use of the legal system and cruel treatment to prosecute women for criminal defamation when they complained of sexual assault while in detention, or to charge them with adultery when their allegation of rape could not be proved.

14. Permitting "honour" or "passion" as a defence to murder created a climate of impunity for that most serious of crimes. Her organization noted with great concern that male defendants guilty of homicide could be acquitted or receive a derisory custodial sentence when the victim purportedly caused shame by seeking divorce, by engaging in an extramarital relationship or refusing to agree to an arranged marriage. Too often there was no interest on the part of police and prosecutors in pursuing investigations into attacks on women because such incidents were treated as essentially private matters beyond the scope and responsibility of the criminal justice system.

15. Her organization was also concerned about attacks on young women in which acid was thrown with the deliberate intention of maiming or disfiguring: the perpetrators were often released on bail only to reoffend or harass their victims and families who sought redress.

16. It was incumbent on the judiciary not to perpetuate, through its decisions, social practices that were contrary to human rights standards. Social practices must not be used as a pretext for perpetuating inequality or injustice, and domestic legislation should be interpreted within the

broader context of international human rights obligations. It was of paramount importance that women who had been the victims of violence should be able to obtain redress, including compensation, through the courts, for only in that way would their rights be fully respected.

17. The sexual abuse of women in armed conflict had, at last, been recognized as a war crime, and sexual offences and persecution on the grounds of gender had been listed as crimes against humanity in the Statute of the International Criminal Court. It was important that the United Nations play a proactive role in the process of amending national legislation to give effect to international human rights law and foster changes in attitudes.

18. Ms. SHIN (Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development) said that, with the backing of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and the Sub-Commission's Special Rapporteur on systematic rape, sexual slavery and slavery-like practices during armed conflict, including internal armed conflict, the survivors of the Japanese military sexual slavery system had for the past 10 years been demanding that the Government of Japan accept its legal responsibility, pay reparation and bring the perpetrators to justice.

19. Not only had that Government refused to do so, however, it had recently approved school textbooks containing a distorted portrayal of history, describing the Asia Pacific War as a liberation for Asian countries, suppressing details of the "comfort women" system and denying the reality of the Nanking massacre. With such a distorted view of history, Japan should not become a permanent member of the Security Council. Unless it could fully accept its past, it was simply not qualified for a position of political leadership.

20. In December 2000, a Women's International War Crimes Tribunal had been held in Tokyo. Over 1,000 participants had listened to testimonies by more than 70 survivors of Japan's military sexual slavery. The conclusion had been that Emperor Hirohito had been guilty of responsibility for rape and sexual slavery as a crime against humanity and that the Government of Japan had incurred State responsibility for that crime.

21. The Karen women of Myanmar had, during 50 years of internal armed struggle, suffered various forms of abuse, such as State-sponsored rape and sexual assault, forced labour, trafficking, forced marriage, forced relocation and political oppression. Such violations should be stopped immediately. The Commission should take action to put an end to impunity, both in Myanmar and in Japan.

22. Mr. WANG Yusheng (United Nations Association of China) said that, despite efforts to eliminate discrimination against women since the Fourth World Conference on Women, serious problems still remained. Too few women held high positions. Only eight women were Heads of State or Government and only 11 per cent of ministers were women. In 45 countries, there were no women ministers. Some 70 per cent of the world's poor and 67 per cent of its illiterates were women. As many as 35 per cent of women suffered from domestic violence. In some countries, women did not even have the vote or the right to education.

23. The prerequisite for social development was that women should enjoy the same rights as men. States should therefore take effective steps to realize women's rights and ensure that they could fully participate in the process of economic globalization. International institutions such

as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the developed countries should provide developing countries with more assistance in solving the problem of women's poverty.

24. Chinese women enjoyed the same rights as men in every aspect of political, economic, social and family life. There were 650 women deputies to the Ninth National People's Congress, or 21.81 per cent of the total. Four state leaders and 18 ministers and vice-ministers were women. Women also led 30 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities. One third of all civil servants were women. Women made up 46.7 per cent of the total workforce, their wages amounting to 80.4 per cent of those of men.

25. The average life expectancy of a Chinese woman was 73 - as against 65 for a man - an increase from 36 before 1949. The maternal mortality rate had fallen to 56.2 per 100,000 from its former level of 1,500 per 100,000. As for education, 98 per cent of women had been illiterate before 1949, whereas by 1999 the female illiteracy rate had dropped to 21.6 per cent (7.2 per cent for young and middle-aged women). The primary school attendance rate for girls was 99.07 per cent and the proportion of women students in higher learning institutions 40.98 per cent.

26. Although great progress had been made, there was still much room for improvement in employment and family life, owing to the survival of the old feudal idea of men's superiority. The Falun Gong, an evil cult which brainwashed its practitioners with "spiritual" beliefs, had recently done great emotional and physical harm to Chinese women. Some had set fire to themselves on Tiananmen Square. The banning of the cult enjoyed immense popular support.

27. Lastly, he expressed his indignation that the Japanese authorities had recently authorized the publication of textbooks which misrepresented the history of the Second World War, in which millions of Chinese had been killed and many women raped. The attempt to whitewash the atrocities committed by Japanese soldiers was an insult to all Asian people.

28. Ms. YOU Xueyun (China Society for Human Rights Studies) said that violence against women and trafficking in women persisted everywhere, including China. In her country, however, some action had been taken. The Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Women, the Criminal Law and the Regulation on Punishment for Public Order all contained articles on the elimination of violence against women. The Marriage Law was being revised to include such articles. The previous year, a campaign had been mounted against trafficking in women: many women had been saved and sent home, and the criminals had been punished.

29. China - one of the first countries to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - was one of the 167 parties to that Convention. The United States, however, had not yet acceded, meanwhile keeping silent about its own violations of women's rights. Women did not enjoy equal protection under the Constitution. They had limited rights to speech in politics and suffered discrimination in employment. Labour protection accorded to women was far below international standards. There was a high incidence of sexual assaults, sexual harassment and domestic violence. The number of female

prisoners had shown a marked increase and some were raped in prison. Most female prisoners who had been sexually abused did not have access to adequate legal protection. The State of Michigan had explicitly proclaimed that prisoners were not protected by civil rights laws.

30. Large numbers of women and children were trafficked to the United States: according to a report by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), as many as 50,000 each year from Asian, Latin American and East European countries. Many became prostitutes or ill-treated domestics.

31. During the Second World War, millions of women had been killed and raped by Japanese soldiers. Insult had been added to injury, however, by the publication of new textbooks distorting the true nature of what had occurred.

32. She also deplored Falun Gong, an evil cult that had forcibly indoctrinated its practitioners with heretical theories and done them irreparable emotional and physical damage. Practitioners - most of whom were women, went mad, injured themselves, committed suicide or murder and abandoned their families.

33. Ms. ABBASS BASHA (International Human Rights Law Group) urged the Commission to work with Afghan non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in exile and in Afghanistan, as well as with international organizations, to engage the Taliban authorities in formulating practices to protect the basic human rights of all Afghans. Afghan women's groups believed that isolating the Taliban authorities would not serve to promote the basic human rights of the country's civilian population.

34. With regard to Bosnia and Herzegovina, the international community should not rest until all victims of mass rape and ethnic cleansing received justice; the continued freedom of those who had committed those crimes remained a source of fear and suffering for the victims. Individual responsibility must be legally determined, particularly in the case of those in positions of authority.

35. In Morocco, women continued to face human rights violations both because of the continued application of the old Mudawwana and because of issues not fully addressed in the 1993 reforms. If a woman decided to get a divorce, she often found herself forced out of her husband's house. She urged the Government of Morocco to include the women's human rights perspective in its legal reforms.

36. Ms. IKPEME (International Human Rights Law Group) said that women in Nigeria continued to face violence and discrimination in the name of cultural, traditional and religious practices. Widows were subject to various unwritten sanctions and were not allowed to inherit their husbands' property. Women subjected to rape, battery and acid throwing often had no access to justice. A 16-year-old girl who had become pregnant following her rape by three men had been convicted of fornication by a shariah court and given a 100 lashes only 30 days after giving birth. Many Muslim legal scholars had argued that it was a violation even of the shariah laws to flog a teenage nursing mother. She urged the Special Rapporteur on violence against women to follow up the case and the Government of Nigeria to provide the victim with full and impartial access to justice.

37. In Pakistan, women victims of violence continued to face legal and social problems. The Government's recent declaration that a crime against women in the name of honour or passion was a criminal offence was very welcome, but it should also enact legislation clearly defining the concept of violence against women and declaring domestic violence, including marital rape, a criminal offence.

38. In Yemen, women faced many problems owing to the patriarchal interpretation of shariah law. Under the Personal Status Law, a woman could not marry without the consent of her male guardian and could not work outside the home without her husband's consent. She urged the Government of Yemen to examine the influence of extreme interpretations of religious texts that could contribute to violence against women.

39. Ms. MIR (Liberation) said that women and girls throughout the world were subject to horrific acts of gender-based violence, often perpetrated not just by agents of the State and armed groups but also by members of a woman's own family or community. In Sri Lanka, security forces engaged in sexual violence against Tamil women and girls. Safeguards to protect women in custody, as contained in presidential directives for the welfare of detainees, were regularly ignored. Effective steps should be taken to protect the victims and witnesses of armed conflict; and any agent of the State found responsible for rape or torture should be brought to justice.

40. Despite the wide publicity given to the issue of "honour killings" in Pakistan, the number of such cases had risen, as had the impunity enjoyed by their perpetrators. The Commission should adopt a resolution condemning the practice and calling on States to repeal discriminatory laws and practices resulting in impunity for such crimes.

41. The use of brutal torture against Kurdish women in Turkey continued to provoke outrage, particularly the sexual nature of the torture techniques used. Such practices went unchecked and were part of a systematic pattern of ethnic violence. As a prospective member of the European Union, Turkey should adhere to the Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

42. Women who had fled from occupied Kashmir were at risk. Their refugee camps did not meet adequate health and hygiene standards. UNHCR should investigate the conditions in the camps.

43. Ms. ARIF (Interfaith International) said that sons who saw their mothers abused might well go on to abuse their own wives, in a vicious cycle of violence. Abused women often suffered from depression and their self-image was destroyed. They feared to seek help since that could lead to more violence. Police in parts of the United States of America received training to recognize battered women and could charge a man with violence without the victim having to file charges. Abuse was still, however, the gravest health problem for women in that country. Stricter laws were clearly needed.

44. Women raped in time of war to dishonour an entire ethnic group were made mere instruments of someone's ethnic cleansing. Women of East Timor held in West Timor refugee camps controlled by the militia had been repeatedly raped. In the case of one woman, the rapist

had killed her brother and had become the father of her child. The plight of the "comfort women" in the Second World War had been horrific. Modern versions of that system existed, however, in the form of "rest and recreation" paid for by military establishments. Governments should discourage their fighting men from engaging in such disrespectful behaviour towards women.

45. She once again, urged religious leaders in countries where "honour killings" were condoned to speak out against such crimes. Many laws that discriminated against women derived from religious practice but honour killing was not one of them.

46. The reproductive rights of women were threatened by the depleted uranium used in the Gulf war, Kosovo, Serbia and elsewhere. The radiation from such uranium had caused women in Iraq to have spontaneous abortions in the fifth or sixth month of pregnancy and the foetuses showed chromosome damage. Some forms of cancer had increased tenfold.

47. Ms. BUNCH (Center for Women's Global Leadership), speaking also on behalf of the International Women's Tribune Centre, expressed alarm at the tendency of some Governments to question whether violence against women did in fact constitute a human rights violation. States were evidently failing to meet their obligation to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and punish violence against women, including violence perpetrated by non-State actors. That failure in itself constituted a human rights violation.

48. When addressing the atrocities committed against women in armed conflict, the Commission should bear in mind that violence in the family - the most prevalent violation of human rights in the world - was still a primary cause of danger and death to women globally, often creating the conditions for further violations in the community. Given that violence in the family was well-documented and hardly required further definition, the Commission should restrict itself to identifying effective measures which States might implement.

49. An understanding of the intersection of race and gender should also be integrated in the forthcoming World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance which would provide an opportunity to demonstrate the indivisibility of human rights and to ensure that the full diversity of human experience was taken into account in all human rights standards and mechanisms. In that context, the Commission should also address the urgent and often neglected area of violence against homosexuals. The silence surrounding such violations - and the impunity too often enjoyed by its perpetrators - undermined the very principles upon which all human rights depended.

50. Ms. AHMATI (Women's Human Rights International Association), drawing attention to the deplorable plight of Iranian women at the hands of a misogynist and repressive regime, said that the Revolutionary Guards (Pasdaran) had entered the homes of persons accused of organizing parties and arrested dozens of women on the grounds that they were insufficiently veiled inside their own homes. The country had at least 25,000 female prisoners, typically serving terms for offences which would not be regarded as such according to international standards. Moreover, women arrested during a demonstration received twice the punishment

accorded to men. In accordance with a religious fatwa, girls had to be violated before being executed. Many thousands of women had been executed over the past 20 years because of their opinions. Women were also tortured in full view of family members.

51. In addition, women did not have the right to travel unless accompanied by a male family member. A man was authorized to prevent his wife from taking up work outside the home, and was allowed to divorce her without proof. Women had reduced access to medical care, and their testimony before a court of law was worth only half that of a man. A woman also received only half the heritage to which a man was entitled. According to the law, girls were considered adults from the age of nine, and punished as such. Forced early marriage was common, and led many girls to attempt escape. The Commission should firmly condemn the execution, torture and ill-treatment of women in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

52. Ms. WIEBE (Human Rights Advocates International) said that, despite international efforts and the elaboration of international standards, the numbers of victims of trafficking had increased. In the past decade, some 30 million women and children had been trafficked from South-East Asia alone, for the purposes of sexual exploitation and "sweatshop" labour. Compared to any other type of illicit activity, such trafficking had the highest profit margin and the lowest risk factor.

53. Globalization had left women behind because of their limited access to land, education and technology. Lured by false promises, many vulnerable women fell prey to unscrupulous traffickers, only to find themselves forced into prostitution, undocumented, illegal and isolated in foreign lands. Contemporary transportation and technology allowed traffickers to move victims further and faster. The lucrative sex trade was flourishing as a result of the failure to enforce laws on trafficking, or the lack of relevant legislation, compounded by government inattention or corruption.

54. Receiving countries should supplement their anti-trafficking efforts by raising awareness of the health and social risks of purchasing trafficked victims. The Commission, for its part, should urge States to: ratify and implement the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol to Prevent and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children; cooperate with the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and; revise their immigration policies to ensure the voluntary and safe repatriation of trafficked victims.

55. Ms. BELKHEIRIYA (Union National de la Femme Tunisienne) said that, in Tunisia, women's rights had gained significant ground in recent decades, with the revision of discriminatory legislative provisions. In particular, the duty of obedience of a wife to her husband had been replaced by the principle of mutual respect and partnership. The legislative protection of the rights of female workers had also been strengthened in order to increase equality between men and women. A further important achievement had been the establishment of a welfare fund for divorced women with children, in particular for those whose former husbands had become insolvent. In partnership with the Government, civil society had been working to help women to achieve economic independence through vocational training and micro-credit schemes ...

56. The CHAIRPERSON said that the speaker had exceeded her allocated time.

57. Ms. HARTH (Catholics for a Free Choice), speaking as a Catholic who dissented from the institutional Church's positions on women and the family, said that she wished to address the issue of Roman Catholic religious extremism against women. The institutional Church adopted positions which jeopardized the health and human rights of women, children and homosexuals, limiting the freedoms of Catholics and non-Catholics alike. That was evidenced in the efforts of the observer for the Holy See: to prohibit or restrict the use of condoms to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS; to prohibit contraception used to prevent unwanted pregnancy; and to prevent non-coercive, safe and legal abortion.

58. Moreover, the institutional Church reduced the status of women to that of being "complementary", rather than fully equal, to men and denied homosexuals the right to express their humanity fully through their sexual and family patterns. The Church's teaching that women were inferior to men made them dangerously vulnerable. For at least five years, the Vatican had been aware of the sexual abuse and rape of nuns by Catholic priests throughout the world, but its efforts to counter such abuse had been grossly inadequate, and the problem had only worsened.

59. Her organization did, however, consider that the Catholic Church had made great contributions to human rights in the twentieth century and regarded the shortcomings in its policies towards women as a correctable blind spot. She thus hoped that her statement would be received in good faith.

60. Ms. DUBOIS (European Women's Lobby) said that the Lobby, which represented 3,000 women's organizations in the European Union, welcomed the reports before the Commission, which unanimously urged better implementation of the existing international standards. Many women and girls in the world encountered violence on a daily basis, and such violence was on the increase in some areas. The reduction of basic services in poorer countries associated with globalization had had a negative impact on the enjoyment by women of their human rights (including their right to education, health and housing), thus creating a situation of persistent violence. Moreover, the feminization of poverty led to the feminization of migration, as well as an increase in trafficking and prostitution.

61. Her organization had been lobbying the European States to address such interrelated phenomena by taking account of the social costs to women of macroeconomic policies and also by combating the "sex market" in receiving countries. The Commission should ensure that parallel efforts were undertaken at all levels. She supported the recommendations made by the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, but urged all the human rights mechanisms to ensure coherence in terminology. In particular, her organization objected to the term "sex worker" which had never been used in any international instrument.

62. Mr. NARANG (Indian Council of Education) said that, over the past 50 years, there had been recommendations and resolutions calling for the respect of non-discrimination principles, yet women continued to be constrained in the enjoyment of their rights. The main reason was their continued marginalization in decision-making, in developed and developing countries alike. Women had been insufficiently involved in the conceptualization of human rights, and they were also under-represented in human rights mechanisms. There was a similar lack of women in senior posts at the United Nations.

63. The real effects of accelerated modernization, urbanization and free markets in developing societies were: a new-found craze for glamour and consumerism, rising family expectations and a blind following of Western styles of living without changes in existing value systems. Women were being asked to supplement the family income without being relieved of their traditional responsibilities as housewives. They were forced to sell their bodies or to bring a dowry, and their increasing unwillingness to be exploited only resulted in increased violence against them. Modernization, the spread of education or the increase in job opportunities for women would not necessarily end the exploitation of women unless their participation in decision-making was increased. Concerted efforts must thus be made by the Commission to adopt resolutions conducive to that end.

64. Ms. HACHTROUDI (International Association of Democratic Lawyers) said that women and girls in the Islamic Republic of Iran were subject to violence from a very early age. Girls were deemed criminally responsible once they reached the age of nine. The number of runaways, particularly girls, was increasing fast, as was drug trafficking and prostitution. Shelters had been set up for runaways, but in some cases that arrangement itself had led to further abuse and there had been allegations of the involvement of prominent persons. She cited articles detailing violence against girls and called on the Commission to condemn the systematic violation of human rights, particularly women's rights, in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

65. Ms. TOLD (Women's International League for Peace and Freedom), citing the findings of her organization's gender-monitoring project during the Commission's current session, said that the vast majority of speakers on behalf of States continued to be men, although a number of women had addressed the Commission under item 12. Most interventions showed little awareness of women; the statements by dignitaries showed more evidence of gender integration. Of the 18 thematic reports reviewed, only 5 showed evidence of full gender integration; 10 were totally gender-blind or mentioned women along with children or as part of a vulnerable group. The commitment to mainstream a gender perspective required ongoing assessment and affirmation.

66. Finally, she applauded the joint work-plan outlined in the report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.4/2001/70-E/CN.6/2001/3) and the news about the planned workshop and the review of gender integration in thematic reports referred to in paragraphs 21 and 22 thereof.

67. Mr. ELGADI (Islamic African Relief Agency), speaking also on behalf of the Global Health Foundation and the Benevolence International Foundation, said that the abduction of women and children in the Sudan was a long-standing phenomenon attributable to conflicts among the tribes of northern and southern Sudan; it was not a form of slavery as alleged by various international voluntary organizations and echoed by the Western media. National Sudanese NGOs, tribal chiefs and the Government had always played a prominent role in ending such conflicts and in bringing about the return of those detained. The practice of abductions was on the decline and he hoped that it would soon end altogether once the root causes of the problem had been addressed.

68. Promotion of the rights of children was a major concern of Sudanese society. The organization on whose behalf he was speaking had started a joint project on conflict resolution and dissemination of the principles of human rights.

Statements made in exercise of the right of reply

69. Mr. RAJA NUSHIRWAN (Malaysia), referring to allegations made by the representative of an NGO at the previous meeting, said that he would confine his reply to the allegations coming under item 12 since he had already responded to those concerning items 9 and 11 which the speaker in question had wrongly repeated. Instead of addressing issues relevant to the current item, that speaker had clearly tried to use the Commission for political purposes.

70. Regarding the insinuation that women were targeted, he said that his Government did not condone the violation of the human rights of any of its citizens, regardless of gender. The rule of law also applied regardless of gender. As for the statement that women were generally disadvantaged in the context of economic, social and cultural rights, the fact that his Government had established a Ministry of Women's Affairs and Family Development and instituted many programmes for women belied that allegation. His Government had always implemented programmes that had resulted in women being equal to men and enjoying equal opportunities.

71. Mr. BENJELLOUN-TOUIMI (Observer for Morocco) said that the representative of the International Human Rights Law Group had referred to a topic which was the subject of a lively debate in Moroccan society. It was quite true that the Mudawwana code on personal status needed to be amended. His Government had every intention of including women's rights in its reform efforts.

72. The Ministry of Women's Affairs had embarked on a campaign to combat violence against women and was currently preparing, together with NGOs and others, a strategy on the subject. It was also preparing a training module for police officers, judicial officers and health personnel. Moreover new laws and regulations were being prepared or existing ones amended by the Departments concerned. In addition, a special commission chaired by the Prime Minister had been established to combat violence against women.

73. On 5 March 2001, the King had established a commission consisting of doctors of Islamic law, judicial officers and others to consider mechanisms to ensure the proper application of the code on personal status and to draft amendments thereto. Its recommendations would be submitted to the King.

74. Ms. AL-SHAMI (Observer for Yemen) said that the information cited by the representative of the International Human Rights Law Group was incorrect. Parliament was elected by the people and drew up laws following an in-depth study and in accordance with the public interest. The judiciary was independent and applied the law independently. The very fact that she was addressing the Commission showed that women in Yemen enjoyed a favourable position compared to women in some other countries.

75. Mr. KHANI JOOYABAD (Observer for the Islamic Republic of Iran) said he wished to refute the unfounded and politically-motivated allegations made by the representatives of two NGOs whose links to terrorist groups based in countries neighbouring upon his own were perfectly evident. As President Khatami had noted in his statement to the General Assembly, the empowerment of women necessitated a reassessment of the traditional view of women which was often inappropriate. The belief in the superiority of men did injustice to all humankind.

He had further stated that men and women were equally valuable members of society, equally possessed of the potential for intellectual, social and political advancement and that sustainable development would be possible only through the active participation of both sexes in economic and social life.

ORGANIZATION OF THE WORK OF THE SESSION (agenda item 3) (continued)

76. Mr. KRISAFI (Observer for Albania), referring to the statement made at the previous meeting by the President of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, said that the internal crisis recently experienced by that country had not been imported from outside but was a consequence of the accumulation of numerous problems over many years. It could be resolved only through dialogue between the Government of that country and Albanian political factors; that was the course recommended by the entire international community.

77. Labelling all Albanians as terrorists and racists was neither helpful nor a reflection of reality; Albanians were well-known to be a civilized and tolerant people. They were one of the few peoples that had never in history attacked or occupied another country.

78. He saw no reason either to link the current situation in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia with the situation in Kosovo. Thanks to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Kosovo had become free of repression and was moving towards reconstruction.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.